THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Yes, Madam.

(b) and (c) Yes, Madam. The Government of India is satisfied with the assurance by the French Government that visas will henceforth be issued expeditiously to holders of diplomatic and official passports.

Indian threat to pull out from US peacekeeping operations

951. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:
SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that India's delegate at the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York has said that 'India might pull out of UN peacekeeping operations in future if the country continued to be kept out of the decision-making process; and

(b) if so, whether it is in accordance with our established foreign policy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) No, Sir. India's delegate at the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York has not made such a statement.

(b) Does not arise.

Construction of Buddha statue by Bhutan

952. SHRI B.J. PANDA:
PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Bhutan proposes to build the world's largest Buddha statue;

(b) if so, the details thereof indicating the time-frame within which it would be started and completed;

(c) what is the status of such rock Buddha statue which was destroyed by the vandalism of Talibans at Bamyan in Afghanistan and whether Afghanistan Government proposes to re-construct this statue; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) According to a report in the official Bhutanese bi-weekly newspaper, Kuensel, a 169 ft. tall Buddha statue in bronze is to be built by a private Bhutanese NGO (Menjong Chhötheun Tshogpa) to commemorate 100 years of the monarchy in Bhutan. The work on statue began in end 2004 and is expected to be completed by 2007.

(c) The rock Buddha statue at Bamyan was completely destroyed during the Taliban regime. We are not aware of any proposal for the reconstruction of the statue.

(d) Not applicable.

Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service

953. SHRIMATI HEMA MALINI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that both the Government have decided to defer the bus service between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib in Pakistan;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it has been deferred temporarily or permanently; and

(d) by when it is expected to be started?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (d) Talks to finalise the arrangements for starting the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service, scheduled for 25-26 October 2005, were postponed due to the earthquake of October 8. The next meeting on Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service is scheduled for 20-21 December 2005.

Discussion with Iranian Vice-President

954. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether former Minister of External Affairs had a meeting with Iran's Vice-President in Moscow in October last;

(b) if so, the nature of discussions held during the meeting and the conclusions arrived at; and

(c) the steps taken by the two countries to implement them?